

Mentoring prepares Soldiers to be tomorrow's leaders

By Master Sgt. Christine E. Seitzinger

In Greek mythology, Mentor was a loyal friend and advisor to Odysseus, king of Ithaca. Mentor helped to raise Odysseus' son Telemachus while Odysseus was away fighting the Trojan War. Mentor became Telemachus' teacher, coach, counselor and protector, building a relationship based on affection and trust.

Mentoring today is synonymous with the process by which we guard and guide others. Mentors seemingly adopt those placed in their care.

Although mentorship is not new to the Army, it is most often associated with officers. But, mentors can be – and are – squad leaders, section or platoon sergeants, first sergeants and sergeants major, as well as officers and civilians.

Mentoring is an especially critical skill for NCOs because they are charged to train and develop junior leaders. Ideally

every Soldier is both a practicing mentor and a protégé recipient of mentorship.

This ideal circle of mentoring only occurs when a unit has created an atmosphere where the art of leadership is recognized as a learning and growing process and where mistakes are tolerated as part of that process.

There is the adage that “some people live and learn; and some just go on living.” Those who do live and learn must be given a chance to succeed or fail. They must be challenged and pushed to take risks – to think for themselves.

Today's recruits are the best and brightest ever. NCOs have the responsibility for developing these Soldiers to the best of their abilities. We make that happen by sharing our knowledge with the leaders of tomorrow. And the most effective way to share that knowledge is through mentoring.

Becoming a mentor should not be a hasty endeavor. It is not a part-time job. It is an intense relationship between teacher and student. The process requires time and caring.

Effective mentors are totally committed to spending the necessary time and attention it takes to share values, attitudes and beliefs. This includes helping a Soldier make career decisions and providing support and encouragement that allow leaders to grow.



Mentor's checklist

- Set an example for the Soldier to follow in your daily displays of courage, candor, competence and commitment.
- Get to know your Soldier inside and out, and identify his or her strengths and weaknesses. Then create a training program that is tailored for your Soldier.
- Review the Soldier's military records, teach the Soldier about these forms and files; and assist with updating and correcting records.
- Develop a job description that includes the Soldier's input.
- Within the framework of the unit's and your standards, work with the Soldier on establishing challenging and attainable goals.
- Discuss with the Soldier the importance of understanding and following the professional Army ethics of loyalty to nation, the Army and the unit, duty, selfless service and integrity.
- Continually evaluate the Soldier's performance and provide timely feedback.
- Teach the Soldier how to objectively evaluate his or her performance and to use each success or failure to learn and grow.
- Formally counsel each quarter – at a minimum.
- Prepare the Soldier's NCOER fairly and accurately.
- Get the Soldier enrolled in MOS and Soldier-oriented correspondence courses.
- Send the Soldier to the Army Education Center to improve communication skills with classes like the Army Writing Program.
- Encourage the Soldier to go to college on a part-time basis.
- Prepare for and send the Soldier to appropriate military schools.
- Give the Soldier additional responsibilities and appropriately reward him or her.
- Help the Soldier learn how to polish communication skills through practical exercises, role playing and junior leadership training.
- Create opportunities and encourage the Soldier to teach classes to other Soldiers.
- Train the Soldiers to do your job; then let the Soldier do it.
- Teach the Soldier how to use Army regulations, field manuals and pamphlets so he or she becomes familiar with them and knows where to get information and answers.
- Prepare the Soldier for promotion; hold mock promotion boards and provide constructive criticism.

Information on training and caring for Soldiers can be found in FM 22-100, *Military Leadership Counseling*; and FM 22-102, *Soldier Team Development*.

The accompanying mentor's checklist also provides some basic guidance. You might have other suggestions or priorities that can be added to this checklist. The important thing is that you offer your Soldiers a program for growth.

Mentoring is not just a fancy buzzword. It is a proven approach and valuable tool for NCO leaders.

Editor's note: Master Sgt. Christine Seitzinger was the Chief Wardmaster of the Department of Nursing, Moncrief Army Community Hospital, Fort Jackson, S.C. when she wrote this article. This article originally appeared in the Spring 1992 issue of the NCO Journal.

